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CITY CITES PETITIONING BRUCE

City police Saturday gave tax limiter Douglas Bruce a citation and municipal court summons while he was peacefully petitioning for lower city taxes. The citation was issued outside the Costco store entrance at Barnes Rd. and Powers Bl.

A former county commissioner and state legislator, Bruce and a colleague, Douglas N. Stinehagen, age 76, were charged with “trespassing” while 25 feet outside the public store's marked entrance. Bruce condemned the city action at a City Hall press conference Monday. He said he did not obstruct the business and has photos and witnesses. An armed police officer successfully demanded the erasure of one of the digital photos Bruce had planned to use as evidence.

Bruce gave the media a police bulletin on city policy. It states, “Officers are reminded not to enforce Trespassing Statutes or Ordinances when an individual enters upon public or private property with public access for purposes involving First Amendment activities. The same is true even though the property may be properly posted. The right to picket, distribute leaflets, or gather petition signatures is an activity which is protected by the First Amendment..”

Bruce noted the city replaced that bulletin within a new one, dated the month after Bruce filed his current petition. The new bulletin lets police cite or arrest any petitioner on public access property. “The city cannot cancel its legal duty to obey the First Amendment, even though it hates this petition to end both stormwater and secret utility taxes,” Bruce replied. “This new policy is a smoking gun, proving the city's retaliatory motive to prevent city petitions it fears.”

“The city has engaged in non-stop, punitive interference with me, and obvious harassment of my petitions,” Bruce asserted. “In past years, they gave me defective petition forms, refused to allow legal petitions to begin, canceled an election on a validated petition, and other illegal actions. This April, the city blocked the start of this petition for six weeks with newly- enacted procedural delays, then faulted me publicly two weeks ago for not completing a 180-day petition drive in 83 days.

“This year, the city has also rejected three other petitions by citizens urging city financial reforms. The city openly stated it disliked their content. City denial of those petitions has been appealed to District Court.

“Two weeks ago, the city clerk falsely claimed I had 'failed' to meet a turn-in deadline she had invented, one she privately admitted had no basis in law. Now the city is physically stopping us from peacefully collecting petition signatures on a simple two-sentence petition to end the hated and unconstitutional stormwater tax, which they falsely call a 'fee,' and to phase out a secret utility tax, both never voter-approved. We hope to turn in our petition signatures next week, before the council puts its tax increase schemes on the ballot. Our turn-in will be 2 ½ months BEFORE the legal due date. We will not be late, but very early.” The petition website is www.CityReforms.com.

Bruce went on to note another string of city actions against him by city-owned Utilities. “In April, Utilities shut off the gas meter in a building I was ready to rent. My account was current. They did not tell me before or after their illegal action. In fact, they now insist I pay the daily service charge for the time they had secretly shut off my gas service! They also flooded an empty house with \$1200 in water, turned on without my knowledge or permission, and then demanded I pay for their wasted water. They shut off heat to an occupied property of mine at Christmas time, again without notice, and then did media interviews about the lack of heat. This month, Utilities extorted \$6,500 in turn-on charges from someone who just bought a townhouse from me. Those are just four examples of many incidents of Utility harassment, sabotage, and abuse. Politicizing utility services to punish one's perceived enemies is as vile and dangerous as is misusing the police in carrying out these city intimidation tactics. The city plays rough,” Bruce said.

Bruce said he would appeal the latest Utilities actions on Wednesday at 1 p.m. before the city council, which serves as the Utilities board.

The first municipal court appearance for Bruce and Stinehagen is September 8th at 1 p.m. Both men stated they are innocent and will demand a speedy jury trial. “We will be vindicated. Charging us is despicable. As a former prosecutor, I find it outrageous that the city is misusing the courts, politicizing the police, and employing these Chicago-style ACORN tactics to prevent our legal petition. These efforts by bullying bureaucrats to use personal intimidation, petition interference, and political coercion will fail,” Bruce predicted.